

wonderful parents, Phil and Cecile Pomerleau, at his ordination in Rome—a very proud time for his parents, certainly a proud time for Claude, but also a very proud time for Marcelle and me.

He has been, in many ways, our spiritual light and friend all these years. He is very much a brother to me, as he is to Marcelle. I have had the privilege one other time to have him as visiting Chaplain. And in my 31 years in the Senate, those two times stand out as highlights in my career.

So again I thank the distinguished Senator from Alaska for showing his usual courtesy, and, of course, I cherish our friendship of over three decades.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Georgia is recognized.

IRAQ

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I rise this morning to reflect for a moment on the apparent successful events in Iraq this weekend and also to look forward to more successful events in the months ahead. It appears the people of Iraq—10 million of them—turned out on Saturday to ratify a constitution under which elections will take place on December 15 of this year. I believe now is an appropriate time for us to recognize, in the process of liberating the people of Iraq, the great accomplishments our brave young men and women have made to allow that process to take place.

About 2½ years ago, America went into Iraq with three stated goals. One was to depose Saddam Hussein. That was done. He goes on trial tomorrow, to be tried by his own people, in his own court, by his own judges. Second, we went in to rid the nation of weapons that could hurt others and stabilize the country so we could accomplish the third goal, which is to allow the people of Iraq to self-determine their future, as we in America did some 229 years ago.

The first goal, deposing Hussein, was accomplished, and he goes on trial. The second goal of stabilizing the country has, in fact, been accomplished. It has been accomplished in a unique way and was ratified by the very election that took place on Saturday, because on Saturday the Iraqi military protected the Iraqi polling places to allow the Iraqis to have an election that had very little disruption or violence by the insurgents. Now we move toward December 15 and the election of a permanent assembly for the people of Iraq to govern themselves.

On the first day of February of this year, I visited Baghdad, shortly after the elections that were held on January 31. I saw on that day the pride of Iraqis holding up their index finger, stained with blue ink, with smiles on their faces and self-satisfaction from having voted, which they did. We saw

at that election where a number of the Sunnis stayed home, where most of the Shiites and the Kurds voted, and there were about 8 million votes.

Just 8 months later, I watched this morning on TV and saw index fingers raised with ink stains to evidence the vote that had taken place, but those ink stains were not just on the fingers of Shiites and Kurds, they were on the fingers of Sunnis as well because, as was said after the first election in Iraq in January, the Sunnis learned that in a democracy, if you do not vote, you do not count. Although their votes may have been different yesterday, it laid the groundwork for this country to self-determine its future in peace, for its three groups within their country to join together, to form a government, to iron out their differences peacefully, and to grow in the Middle East what many thought was never possible, and that is an Arab nation self-determining its future, with its people electing its representatives, living and growing in peace and harmony with its neighbors.

There have been a lot of critics of our efforts in Iraq. There have been some who have said the war was wrong and others who have said we ought to come home, when, in fact, they have misjudged and mischaracterized the entire event. For us to come home is to lose the war. For us to stay is for liberty and peace and freedom to take root, to grow, and to prosper, and for an area of the world that for all time has been in turmoil to have the chance in future time to be in peace. That is not just good for the Middle East. That is not just good for the Iraqis. That is good for America. That is good for the nations of the world. That is good for the future peace of this great Nation we call the United States of America, for it was terrorism that drug us into the Middle East. It is terrorism, through insurgents, that we fight today in Iraq. And it is terrorism that will lose, not in the end to bullets but to votes, with a people free to self-determine their future.

The people in Iraq began that process on January 31 and reaffirmed that process this past Saturday. I am confident and looking forward to the future, that on December 15 they will reaffirm that process again by holding free elections, guarded—and peacefully guarded—by their own trained troops, who will be the security force that in the future replaces our men and women, and that they will secure the country of Iraq not just for one election, not just for one day, but for the future.

It has been said that victory in Iraq is a process and not an event. I believe that is an appropriate statement. We have gone through a process that deposed an evil dictator, stabilized a violent nation, allowed free elections to take place, for a constitution to be drawn, for elections for its ratification to take place, and now we are on the doorstep of the election of those permanent representatives who will self-

determine the future of the nation of Iraq. In this process, known as freedom, America has contributed much.

Our sons and daughters have been there steadfastly fighting the insurgents, securing the Iraqi people, and giving the flame of liberty and freedom a chance to grow and glow. On Saturday that process apparently took place again. I look forward to it taking place on December 15. I thank God for the brave men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces and the resilience of our people as, once again, we are the leading light for freedom, peace, hope, and liberty not just in our own country but around the world.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VITTER). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to use my leader time and not interfere with morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEADERSHIP PAC RIDER

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this morning I would like to speak for a short time about a provision of the bill before the Senate, the Transportation bill, that was removed by Republican leaders when the bill was taken up yesterday. I commend my colleagues, Senators FEINGOLD and MCCAIN, for their leadership in advocating to the Republican leaders to take this step. The provision should not pass quietly in the night. It was in this bill. It should not have been. More importantly, it should not emerge in any way in the future in some type of a must-pass conference report.

The leadership PAC rider would have created a giant loophole in our campaign finance laws and would have permitted unseemly money transfers among incumbents and national parties.

Today, leadership PACs are bound by the same campaign finance rules as are regular campaign PACs, known as political action committees; that is, leadership PACs can't give more than \$15,000 annually to the national parties. The rider inserted in this bill during markup by the Republican leadership removed this limit on leadership PACs so they could transfer unlimited funds to national parties.

My colleagues, Senators FEINGOLD and MCCAIN, rightly decried this move as a major circumvention of our campaign finance laws. The provision would have directly undermined the point of those laws: preventing corruption in fact and in appearance. I joined with them to oppose this provision and

assured them that the Democrats would stand united with them on a motion to strike this rider or to prevent the bill from moving forward.

Through the efforts of Senators FEINGOLD and MCCAIN, we had the votes to strip this provision from the bill, and everyone knew that. Recognizing that, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle agreed to remove it from the bill. I made it clear to my colleague and friend, the majority leader, that we would not accept a conference report with reemergence of this provision.

COMPENSATION FOR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

I also want to say another word about my friend, RUSS FEINGOLD. RUSS FEINGOLD is a person who is very talented. He is a unique advocate for many issues that affect this country. I have just talked about campaign finance reform. He is and has been a leader on campaign finance reform. There are times that I disagree with RUSS FEINGOLD but not often. He is a person who brings unique attributes to the Senate. Academically, he is without peer. He graduated from Harvard Law School and is a Rhodes scholar.

Today, he will speak on behalf of this side of the aisle on a provision dealing with compensation for Members of Congress. There are times when a COLA is certainly in keeping with the needs of this body and the country, but there are times when it is not. As I have indicated, RUSS FEINGOLD has never shied away from offering contentious, difficult amendments. Today, I am happy to see the other side of the aisle recognize that this amendment would pass, the Feingold amendment that has been offered by him alone in years past. The majority decided they would step in the shoes of Senator FEINGOLD because they knew this was a time—with Katrina, with the many other problems facing our country—when a pay raise was not appropriate.

I want the record to be spread with the fact that RUSS FEINGOLD is a person whose good work I so appreciate. I admire him and the work that he does and want everyone within the sound of my voice to understand that this amendment we will dispose of prior to 12:30 today has been the Feingold amendment year after year after year. Now I am happy to see that others have joined with him.

While I have disagreed with him on this issue in the past, no one can take away from the fact that this has always been RUSS FEINGOLD's mantra: that he would offer the amendment to make sure that the congressional pay raise did not go forward.

He certainly was not successful in years past, but everyone recognized that he would be this year. Therefore, the majority, in an effort to take away a little recognition from him, decided they would do it. But recognition will always be there because RUSS FEINGOLD has always been out front on this issue.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. OBAMA. I ask that I be able to proceed out of order. It is my understanding the Republicans actually control the time at the moment. I ask unanimous consent that I be able to proceed and the time to be taken out of the Democratic time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AVIAN INFLUENZA

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, we are continuing to witness, as I think you are aware, the relentless spread of avian flu carried slowly, but predictably, by wild migratory birds from countries in Southeast Asia to western China to Mongolia and then over the Ural Mountains into Russia and Ukraine. From there, avian flu this week has spread over to Romania and Turkey, and we have just learned possibly into Greece.

Dr. Joseph Domenech, chief of the Animal Health Service at the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, has been quoted as saying that "... we are not surprised."

At this point, no one should be surprised. The experts have told us repeatedly that a flu pandemic is inevitable, although the timing is unpredictable. In other words, the question is not if but when. The spread of avian flu is our warning signal, and we need to heed this call to action.

If we are lucky, we will have at least a year or perhaps several years to prepare for a flu pandemic, but we might not be so lucky. Regardless of whether it is this particular strain of avian flu, H5N1, or another deadly strain, the time to act is long overdue if we want to prevent human suffering, death, and economic devastation.

International health experts say that two of the three conditions for an avian flu pandemic in Southeast Asia already exist. First, a new strain of the virus has emerged to which humans have little or no immunity. Second, this strain has shown that it can jump between species.

The last condition, the ability for the virus to travel efficiently from human to human, has not been met, and it is the only thing preventing a full-blown pandemic. Once this virus mutates and can be transmitted from human to human, we will not be able to contain this disease. Because of the wonders of modern travel, a person could board a plane in Bangkok, Athens or Bucharest and land in Chicago less than a day later, unknowingly carrying the virus. In fact, we learned this lesson from SARS, which moved quickly from Asia to Canada, where it led to many deaths.

As my colleagues know, one of my top priorities since arriving in the Sen-

ate has been to increase awareness about the avian flu. In April of this year, I introduced the Avian Act, which is a comprehensive bill to increase our preparedness for an avian flu pandemic. This bill was incorporated into a larger bill, the Pandemic Preparedness and Response Act that Senator REID and I introduced 2 weeks ago. We need to move this bill as quickly as possible.

We also need to provide more funding to purchase vaccines and antivirals and improve our ability to spot and isolate a pandemic as soon as it begins. In the spring and summer, I worked to secure \$25 million in funding to fight the avian flu. Today, some of this money is already helping the World Health Organization to step up its international surveillance and response efforts.

But obviously more money is needed—much more. Last month, I joined Senator HARKIN and others in offering an amendment to the DOD appropriations bill to provide almost \$4 billion to fight the avian flu. I am pleased that Senator STEVENS cosponsored the amendment and it was accepted into the appropriations bill. At this point, I am hoping that the House will agree to this funding in conference.

Although we have begun to step up to the plate in the Senate, it is unfortunate that none of the avian flu bills that have been introduced have yet been passed into law. There has been too much talk, not enough action. And this is not just true in the Congress.

One year after publishing the draft pandemic flu plan, the administration still has not released the final HHS pandemic flu preparedness plan. Half the States have not published plans either, and we know that many of these States will need substantial help.

This lack of planning is compounded by the fact that we still don't have an FDA-approved vaccine against avian flu, and the one drug that many countries are relying on, Tamiflu, may be less effective than experts had thought. The manufacturer is also struggling to meet the demand, and it could take up to 2 years for it to make enough for the U.S. stockpile, presuming this administration finally puts in an order for the drug.

I ask my colleagues how many hearings and briefings have they sat through where witnesses and experts have urged the Government to be better prepared for these types of crises?

The failure to prepare for emergencies can have devastating consequences. We learned that lesson the hard way after Katrina. This Nation must not be caught off guard when faced with the prospects of a pandemic because the consequences are simply too high.

The flyways for migratory birds are well established. We know that avian flu will likely hit the United States in a matter of time. With the regular flu season coming up shortly, conditions will be favorable for the reassortment of the avian flu virus with the annual flu virus.